



## Nigeria

### Bringing Women into the Political Process

*During the ENABLE project, CEDPA worked with 23 non-governmental and community-based organizations in 18 states to strengthen their skills in advocacy so they would be able to lobby for increased women's participation and engagement in the political processes.*

Between 1998-2002, the democracy and governance (DG) component of the ENABLE project in Nigeria consisted of:

- Developing broad coalitions and networks among non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) to increase women's political participation and bring about changes in legislation that would positively affect women.
- Strengthening NGOs' skills in effectively advocating for women's increased political participation.

As a result of CEDPA's work with its partner organizations:

- An estimated 689 coalitions of women's groups, known as 100 Women Groups (100 WG), were formed at the community, local, state, and national levels.
- Laws banning female genital cutting (FGC) were passed by Edo and Rivers States. The Northern Cross River Women Association in Cross River State is currently working to have an anti-FGC bill passed.
- Federation of Ebonyi Women's Association in Ebonyi State and the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) in Edo State have secured bills banning unjust widowhood practices, while community women, aided by the Development Education Center in Enugu State, have worked to abolish such practices in their Local Government Area.



#### 100 Women Groups: Giving Women a Voice

In March 1996, CEDPA launched its pilot of the 100 WG strategy. The strategy, which builds on the collective strength of traditional women's organizations, has proven to be an effective way to facilitate information-sharing among grassroots women and foster collective strategic planning. Each 100 WG brings together up to 100 women representing 10-15 CBOs to address issues of common concern. These coalitions provide avenues for women's participation in decision making at the community, local, state, and national levels.

By linking women's organizations through the 100 WG framework, CEDPA's strategy has emerged as an innovative method to create political awareness and participation and stimulate social mobilization. Its success has generated interest from other CEDPA

partners and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) missions in neighboring Senegal and Benin.

- With the support of the 100 WG in Ebonyi State, laws that prohibited widows from inheriting their deceased husbands' property were overturned.
- Country Women Association of Nigeria's 100 WG members make a small monthly contribution to the Women's Political Participation and Development Fund. The money from this fund goes exclusively to political activities on behalf of female candidates. Since the inception of the fund, 17 women received loans to contest elections.
- In 1999, 43 women were elected to office with the support of 100 WGs. Additional women were elected to positions as councilors, appointed to the cabinets of traditional chiefs, and elected to the State House of Representatives.

Most 100 WGs were formed without outside funding and they continue to be active.

## Partnerships Among Women: Legal Bans on FGC

The Rivers and Edo State branches of FIDA implemented a project – Engendering Legislative Issues – to bring women's issues into the states' legislative agendas through advocacy and policy change.

Building upon the increasing interest in banning FGC, FIDA worked with various organizations, including the National Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ), the National Council of Women Societies (NCWS), and the Medical Women Association (MWA), to garner support for a bill against FGC. The collaboration built on the strengths of the organizations in the following ways:

- FIDA provided legal expertise to draft a bill.
- NAWOJ provided statewide media coverage of the issue, generating public interest and support through coverage of public hearings and debates.
- NCWS, an umbrella organization for women's groups, mobilized a critical mass of advocates from across the state.

- Women from MWA disseminated information about the health implications of FGC.

The work of these groups eventually led to the passing of the Female Circumcision (Abolition) Law, which was signed by Rivers State Governor, Dr. Peter Odili, in August 2001.



In Edo State, FIDA, in collaboration with other women's groups, succeeded in having two laws passed banning FGC and harmful traditional practices in October 1999 and November 2001, respectively. To assist in creating an environment in which laws could be enforced, FIDA worked to:

- Organize workshops along with television and radio programs to sensitize women and community leaders about the existence of these laws.
- Set up legal clinics for widows whose rights had been violated or who wanted to take legal action to retain their deceased husbands' property.

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